



Pilot Program for Licensure of Foreign-Trained Nursing Professionals:

Building on Untapped Community Assets to Diversify the Health Workforce



BACKGROUND

According to the Health Resource and Services Administration and Baltimore's Center for Health Workforce Development of the University of Maryland, by 2012 the State of Maryland will have a shortage of 17,000 nurses. A recent report from the Maryland Hospital Association indicates that the continuing nursing shortage in Maryland compromises assuring healthcare effectiveness. An average vacancy rate of 13 percent was reported by Maryland hospitals in 2006, and projections show the shortage could grow to over 10,000 Registered Nurses (RNs) by 2016, if nothing is done. Moreover, according to the Sullivan Commission, only two percent of all U.S. RNs are Hispanic/Latino. Some of the major factors that have contributed to this imbalance include: under representation of Latinos in the educational pipeline of the health professions; lack of adequate mechanisms for identifying, recruiting, retaining, and promoting Latinos in health and science professions; under funding for Latinos in health and science education programs; and the underutilization of linguistically and culturally competent foreign-trained Latino health professionals (Office of Minority Health, 2000).

Montgomery County is not exempt from the Nation's shortages of qualified healthcare workforce members. A recent report issued by the Health Workforce Committee of the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) identified the need to increase minority health professionals, particularly Spanish speaking culturally competent healthcare providers as a priority for Montgomery County.

The lack of diversity in the health workforce leads to poor health outcomes for certain members of racial and ethnic minorities, translates into loss of lifespan and productivity, increased healthcare costs, and reduced quality of life (The Sullivan Commission, 2004). Studies have shown that cultural and linguistic barriers in healthcare encounters often lead to poor communication, patient dissatisfaction, and poor compliance with regards to treatment and medication.

In response to the critical need for culturally and linguistically competent nurses and to respond to the current shortage, the Latino Health Initiative (LHI) of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services established the Pilot Program for Licensure of Foreign-Trained Nursing Professionals ("Nurses Pilot Program"). Developed in 2005, the Nurses Pilot Program is an evidenced based model that seeks to increase the number of Latino health professionals in the county's healthcare workforce—one of the priorities outlined in the *Blueprint for Latino Health in Montgomery County, Maryland 2002-2006*.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The goal of the Nurses Pilot Program is to address the nursing professional shortage by increasing the supply of RNs through the provision of services that facilitate the Maryland licensure process of individuals trained outside the United States. The Nurses Pilot Program combines the synergy of various institutions including the County Government (Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Economic Development and Montgomery Works One-Stop Workforce Center), the academic sector (Montgomery College and Welcome Back Initiative of City College of San Francisco and San Francisco State University), and the private sector (Holy Cross Hospital, Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board, Montgomery Works Career Transition Center and the Washington Adventist Hospital).

The LHI provides overall coordination of the Program by maintaining close communication with all partners as well as by providing comprehensive case management to each of the participants in order to develop an individual plan towards obtaining their RN license. Each partner, according to its expertise, is responsible for a specific program component. The four program components include: guidance and support; academics; practical exposure to the U.S. healthcare system; and mentoring. Through the integrated and coordinated approach of the various services and financial assistance provided to participants, the program is able to effectively address the needs and decrease the challenges and barriers Latino nurses face while trying to obtain a nursing licensure in Maryland.



Ana Ramirez, RN, participant of the Nurse Pilot Program assisting a patient during the 2006 Ama Tu Vida Festival.

“The collaboration between Holy Cross Hospital and the LHI fits the classic definition of one which benefits everyone; the nurses who have earned their licenses, the hospital which gains outstanding staff, and, most importantly, the community. Growing the supply of nurses will be a critical public health need for our region for years to come. So will the need for increased competency by healthcare organizations in providing culturally sensitive care to our increasingly diverse population. This great program meets both of these critical needs and we are committed to working with the LHI to maintain it and even expand it going forward.”

—Kevin J. Sexton, President and CEO, Holy Cross Hospital

Since implementation of program activities in 2006, we have successfully helped eight foreign-trained nurses to obtain the RN license in Maryland and secure employment, thus increasing the number of Latino healthcare professionals providing culturally and linguistically appropriate health services. The inclusion of these professionals, fully certified according to U.S. standards, is not only good public health practice but also serves as an opportunity for economic development and growth for the individuals as well as the healthcare industry.

HIGHLIGHTS

From March 2006 until December 2007, the LHI Nurses Pilot Program:

- Partnered with the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board and provided financial assistance to program participants for training expenses including: English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, nursing refresher courses, board exam reviews, nursing licensure related fees, and stipends for child care and public transportation.
- Provided group and individual case management sessions to 25 participants to assure that their needs and concerns were addressed effectively and in a timely manner. Case management is a labor intense effort with regular 60-minute individual sessions to review progress on individual plan goals as well as on-going communication as needed.
- Partnered with Montgomery College to develop the innovative ESL for Healthcare Professionals course specifically customized for the cohort of nurses participating in the pilot program. Also, facilitated registration of participants in the nurse refresher course as well as the nursing board exam review.
- Partnered with Holy Cross and Washington Adventist Hospitals to develop the component that provides practical exposure to the U.S. healthcare system and mentoring through the creation of a “Nurse-in-Training” position. This full-time paid position offers full benefits to participants and assigns them a preceptor while they prepare for the nursing board exam.
- Developed and conducted an English pronunciation course customized for those needing assistance to pass the oral proficiency exam, as well as to qualify to work as a Nurse-in-Training.
- Achieved a remarkable participant retention rate of 100 percent, well above the 50 percent rate reported by the Workforce Investment Board as an average for other workforce development programs.
- Secured funding from the Health Services Cost Review Commission Nurse Support Program I for Holy Cross and Washington Adventist Hospitals to continue and further develop the practical exposure to the U.S. healthcare system and mentoring component of the program.

LHI Nurses Pilot Program Results (March 2006 – December 2007)

PROGRAM MEASURE	Percentage	Number of Nurses
Participants retained	100%	25
Percentage of participants satisfied with the program	94%	—
Participants completing credential evaluation (Step 1 required to obtain the RN license)	48%	12
Participants passing English oral proficiency exam (Step 2 required to obtain the RN license)	52%	13
Participants passing the nursing board exam (NCLEX-RN) (Step 3 required to obtain the RN license)	32%	8
Participants working as RNs	28%	7
Average change in wages from the time participants entered the program until hired as RNs	150%	—



At the end-of year celebration in June 2007, from left to right Delegate Heather R. Mizeur, Elizabeth Rojas, Nury M. Marroquin, and Ana Ramirez.

“The LHI helped me to continue improving my English skills and to enter as a Nurse-in-Training at Holy Cross Hospital. Once I passed the nursing board exam, I continued working as an RN at the hospital. Since I became part of the Nurses Pilot, my life and my family’s life changed for good. I am very grateful.”

**—Elizabeth Rojas, RN
Program Participant**



Nurses Pilot Program
Latino Health Initiative
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
8630 Fenton Street, 10th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Phone: 240-777-4796

For more information about the Latino Health Initiative,
visit our website: <http://lhiinfo.org>

February 2008